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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001032

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SUBJECT: HOW NOT TO LOSE THE NORTH

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1B. KABUL 940 07
1C. KABUL 979 07

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD E. NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Having been caught off guard by the Taliban's opportunistic efforts in the South, post stepped back to look at the situation in the North to assess how best to avoid destabilizing violence and power vacuums in the region. The current stability in northern Afghanistan can be credited less to the effectiveness of local or national government than to the control wielded by local power brokers and the lack of a focused insurgency like the Taliban in the south. Corruption, drug trafficking, and criminality plague the north. Improving good governance and establishing legitimate stability require credible government structures, an operational justice system, and an economy strong enough to survive the removal of drug traffickers and corrupt officials. Focusing on one issue to the exclusion of others would leave critical gaps in our overall strategy to ensure lasting security. Implementation challenges are substantial. The GOA's political must play a vital role. ISAF could have a key role to play, but NATO as an organization has not shown the political will even to seriously discuss the issues. END SUMMARY.

Northern Stability Is Superficial

12. (C) Despite the pressures of the insurgency in the South, we cannot wholly divert resources or attention from the North on the mistaken assumption that all is well there. The superficial stability that exists is fragile and masks considerable public disenchantment with the central government. Badakhshan's remote location helps protect the narco-economy that dominates the political and economic landscape. Takhar is dealing with organized crime and the control that local power brokers have over the province. Baghlan is plagued with local criminality based largely on tribal clashes and banditry. Balkh is mired in a corrupt provincial government structure with a dominant governor whose personal interests outweigh his sense of public

service. Kunduz is struggling to deal with a large influx of Pashtun refugees. Jowzjan is faced with a power struggle between Tajik, Uzbek, and Pashtun leaders who are vying for control. In each case, the veneer of stability rests on factors that represent an obstacle to responsive governance, which feeds discontent.

Corruption Must Be Reduced

¶3. (C) Unless provincial governments and federal authorities ensure that arrested criminals are prosecuted and imprisoned, locals have no reason to believe that the current economy and governance system, which has been dominated for so long by corrupt and nepotistic leaders, can function differently. If governmental corruption could be reduced to a minimum, locals would be more willing to support efforts by provincial government to establish itself as the legitimate guarantor of security. Currently, removing corrupt officials from their positions often results in nothing more than their transfer to another post within the provincial or district government. The selection of the new district police chiefs as part of the phase III rank reform will help address this issue, but more remains to be done.

¶4. (SBU) Pay reform is also a critical part of this equation. All Northern provinces are scheduled to undergo a pay reform over the next few months which will allow policemen to be paid directly from a local officially recognized bank. Ensuring that provincial departments receive their budget money will also help instill hope in the local population that change is coming to the North, and not all of the profit is going to the drug traffickers and corrupt

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officials.

Stronger Economy Will Help Stability

¶5. (C) There is a strong entrepreneurial tradition in many parts of the North, and establishing legitimate, transparent business processes such as customs and tax collection, business registration, legally addressing complaints, hiring on merit, and contracting via open competition is vital to strengthening the economy, especially in Mazar e Sharif. Strengthening the Mazar economy would sideline Governor Atta's corrupt government by reducing the populace's dependency on the government for survival. To this end, the USG is working on strengthening the private sector by facilitating a reform of the tax and customs processes. Anti-corruption efforts, such as prosecuting officials linked to Atta or going after Atta himself, should be pursued but in a balanced way so that such actions do not become destabilizing.

Removing Narco-Traffickers Key to Security

¶6. (C) In contrast to Balkh province, the economies of Baghlan, Takhar, and especially Badakhshan provinces are much more dependent on narco-trafficking and smuggling of goods and weapons. Efforts to strengthen the local economy in these provinces would have little effect on wresting control of the province from local power brokers in the short-term. Without action taken to marginalize the entrenched criminally-connected power centers in Badakhshan, we stand a fair chance of winning the war on terror in the north by preventing mass Taliban/other opposing force infiltration, only to lose the province to narco-threats.

¶7. (C) Several actions could be taken to marginalize the entrenched narco-barons power centers. The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) process can be seriously strengthened, with a push to collect weapons other than the old, often unusable arms that have been collected in the

past. To accomplish this, more resources need to be invested into building local police capacity and strengthening the judicial institutions to prosecute successfully. Major arrests of the most prominent drug traffickers would send a strong signal that the GOA is committed to installing rule of law in the North. We will continue strongly to encourage Karzai to appoint clean individuals to official positions in the provinces. A more rigorous vetting procedure would help eliminate individuals with narco-connections from being slotted into government positions. A message needs to be sent to the criminal elements currently in control that they will no longer be able to operate freely; efforts are being made to bring rule of law to the north.

National Police Need Shoring Up

¶18. (C) The Ministry of the Interior is increasing the pace of recruitment and training to deploy more Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers to the North. However, the numbers of Afghan National Police (ANP) being deployed to the North are growing more slowly because the focus is currently on the South. Regional Command North has said that an additional 200 police advisors are needed to provide adequate mentoring and training of the 11,000 ANP that work in the north. Providing more advisors for the police would help create the capacity within the local police that is needed to minimize the possibility of creating a power vacuum that other criminal elements could take advantage of and establish themselves as the new local power brokers.

¶19. (SBU) Rank reform, particularly the replacement of district police chiefs, will improve the quality of police leadership. Pay reform should provide incentives to improve recruitment and retention. The creation of a civil order

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police unit will allow for a quick reaction force to respond to civil disturbances. However, these are all medium-term solutions that require time and resources to implement. They depend on the GOA's political will to see them through.

COMMENT

¶110. (C) Dislodging the status quo of corrupt officials and narco-barons without creating the kind of instability which has been fertile ground for the insurgency in the South will take careful planning, time, and determination. It is vital that these problems be tackled concurrently. Arresting corrupt officials should be accompanied by developing a functioning justice system. Removing drug traffickers from power should be followed with providing employment opportunities for poppy farmers who find themselves out of a job. Focusing on one issue to the exclusion of others would leave critical gaps in our overall strategy to ensure lasting security in the North.

¶111. (C) Implementation difficulties associated with addressing these issues are substantial. Significantly reducing corruption, strengthening the local economy, removing narco-traffickers, and shoring up the National Police require time and resources. GOA political will and its ability to back it up are also key factors. ISAF thus far has not shown the will to confront criminality with force in the north. It does not have a mandate to do so. It will need to engage more on these issues if we want to ensure lasting stability in the north, particularly if we are not to be content with just waiting for years for GOA institutions to develop. But for ISAF to do more, its guidance would have to change and that is a discussion that needs to occur in capitals and Brussels.

¶112. (C) Removing a few corrupt senior officials, warlords, or drug-traffickers will be viewed as nothing more than window dressing by locals. Real and lasting change will

require substantial investments of time, energy, and capital. The GOA needs to demonstrate more political will to engage substantially on these challenges in the North. Nevertheless, attention needs to be paid to the varied challenges presented in the North. While the Taliban may not be poised at the doorstep of the northern provinces, locals are looking for alternatives. Now is the time to establish good governance and rule of law before northerners find another, less desirable way to deal with their current circumstances. END COMMENT.

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